The Manchester seminar

The Anglo-Polish Perspectives on Sexual Politics workshop was held at Manchester Metropolitan University on July 3rd 2009. In the organizers' words, the aim of the workshop was "to generate discussion of sexual politics in Poland [...] and to further the development of a network of scholars working on sexual politics in Poland." The participants (a majority of whom were young and mid-career scholars working in Poland or in the UK) had a chance to present and discuss their ideas on the present state of sexuality-related politics and scholarship in Poland, with reference to British and international contexts. At the end of the workshop it was agreed that the brief statements each participant had prepared before the workshop as a "springboard" for discussion would be published (mostly unedited, and in both English and Polish) in a special section of the InterAlia journal. The Authors and the InterAlia editors believe that, though undeveloped, these short commentaries may prove thought-provoking and trigger further discussions among queer scholars and activists in Poland and internationally.

While the presentations addressed a wide variety of questions and subjects, as seen from different disciplinary and/or local perspectives, it seems that one of the common denominators was a perceived "failure" of queer politics in Poland. This failure or crisis was variously diagnosed and diverse remedies were offered: while some sought the more traditional path of legal reform (often under the EU umbrella), others called for alternative paths that would challenge the present constructions of sexual/gender identities and the ensuing types of politics. Should liberal Western democracies be treated as a model to be followed by the less "civilized" countries such as Poland, or are such notions anglo-centric, tailored to fit neoliberal philosophies, or rooted in a simplistic and demonized rendering of the space called "Central and Eastern Europe"? The following texts show that constructing queer identities, histories and futures remains a highly contested area.

The workshop participants and the InterAlia editors wish to thank Jon Binnie, Christian Klesse and Ania Gruszczyńska for their organizational effort and generous hospitality. In view of the very promising outcomes of the event, we do hope similar meetings will take place in the future.

Activism and presence in the times of transformation. Searching for LBTIQ on the crossroads of gender, nationality and religion